19: Asboe M-3 (no date) 1937 AJ4 W. Tibetans AJ4
Lahul

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AGRICULTURAL METHODS IN LAHOUL, WES

90 The peasants in Western Tibet are in the main agriculturalists, though on the high plateaus of that country (14,000 to 16,000 feet above sea level), there are to be found large tribes of nomads who follow a purely pastoral occupation.

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Whilst both men and women engage in field work, it is the latter sex upon whom the burden of farming really rests. The share of agricultural pursuits which falls to the male sex consists of building walls and repairing them, sowing, ploughing, repairing watercourses, building corn stacks, and assisting at the threshing operations.

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The women on the other hand are so fully employed in the running of the farms that they have little leisure for pilgrimages to sacred

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shrines, or visits to far distant relations. The men folk in Lahoul occupy their time during the summer months in wool trading, and travelling hither and thither with merchandise.

The farm duties of the female sex are the carrying and spreading of manure on the fields in spring and autumn, harrowing or beating the clods of earth in the wake of the ploughmen, making ridges in parallel or oblique lines over the fields to render irrigation easier, placing stones, sticking stones in the ground vertically for diverting the water during the process of watering, weeding, once, when the first blades of barley or wheat appear above the ground, and again, when the ears have formed, and it is easy to pluck out the long weeds with the hands.

Irrigation, reaping, threshing, winnowing and carrying in of the crops are performed by the women, with occasional help from the men when such are available.

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In Lahoul, where the snowfall in winter is heavy, the time for beginning agricultural operations varies slightly each year, though the middle of April is usually the time when farm work is contemplated.

The various occupations of the agriculturalist

19: Asboe M-3 (no date)1937 AJ4 W. Tibetans AJ4
Lahul

221 **TERN TIBET.** *By Walter Asboe.*

241 in Western Tibet, in the order in which they occur from April until December are :—

1. Wall building and repairing breaches.
2. Cutting new watercourses, and repairs to old ones.
3. Planting of willow saplings.
4. Collecting of thorns for hedging fields.
5. Carrying out and spreading manure on fields.
6. Sowing and ploughing.
7. The ceremony of blessing the fields.
8. Beating straw for straw shoes : this done by the women.
9. Mud washing and general spring-cleaning of the houses.
10. Watering grass land.
11. Weeding with small hoe (*surmo*).
12. Irrigating the fields.
13. Beating straw for straw shoes (this, during a slack time).
14. Cutting the grass and storing it on house roofs.
15. Reaping the grain fields.
16. Building corn stacks.
17. Threshing.
18. Winnowing.
19. Carrying out and spreading manure on fields.
20. Collecting wood for the winter fuel.
21. Milling grain for the winter supply.

221 286 From December until spring farming pursuits cease, owing to the heavy snowfall, and the population engages in village social functions, spinning and weaving of yarn for clothes.

656 425 Lahoul being under British administration, the acquirement and disposal of land are regulated in accordance with Government rules. Similarly in Ladakh, another district of Western Tibet, the people are subject to the revenue regulations of the native State of Kashmir.

241 787 Although in certain parts of Western Tibet the people do not engage in any agricultural enterprise

19: Asboe M-8 (no date) 1937 AJ4 W. Tibetans AJ4 Lahul

241 before a verdict as to the propitious moment for beginning such occupations is given by the 787 hierarchy, this custom is considerably relaxed in Lahoul, where the community does not pay so much attention to the priestly oracle as do the people living in the more remote valleys of Western Tibet.

Landmarks.

423 Rocks, stones and watercourses serve as landmarks to distinguish between the various 685 farm holdings. When disputes occur, arising out 691 of the removing of rock or stone landmarks, a subordinate in the Government survey department is called in to remeasure the land which is under dispute, and legal proceedings are taken by the offended party.

Virgin Soil.

425 When a farmer contemplates cultivating virgin soil, he has first of all to consult the wishes of the community, lest he should infringe the rights of communal pasturage, before negotiating with the Government authorities under whose administration he lives. If the community is agreed that [273] there is no encroachment on the pasturage, a beer drinking party for all concerned is arranged at the expense of the farmer, who may then proceed to acquire the prospective piece of waste land from the Government.

Regulation of Water Supply.

312 An adequate supply of water from rivers, 624 glaciers and accumulations of snow is essential in a practically rainless country such as Western Tibet is. Hence the community is most jealous in protecting its rights over such water supply. Two men (Las-pa) are chosen in rotation yearly by the villagers to supervise the communal water supply.

Their duties consist of (1) calling the villagers when the watercourse has to be repaired, (2) collecting beer from each household for the nourishment of about 14 people engaged in the repairs.

In Ladakh the watchers of the water supply are called 'Choo-spon' (lit. Master of the water 241 supply). In cases where there is a communal 312 reservoir for collecting water for the fields, the 'Choo-spons' (usually two or three men) allot the amount of water for each farmstead, and so prevent the possibility of one farmer stealing more water than is his rightful share.

Arrangement of Fields.

Owing to the mountainous nature of the

19: Asboe M-3 (no date)1937 AJ4 W. Tibetans AJ4
Lahul

country, the fields are arranged in terraces, and irrigated by watercourses cut in fan-like formation from a river, mountain torrent, or from glaciers and large accumulations of snow. 241 312

Size of a Farmstead.

The extent of a man's fields is popularly computed in terms of a yoke of oxen (dzo-ldor), or in a dry measure called a 'Kal' (40 lb.) of seed. Thus if one asks a peasant how large is his arable land, he will reply that he possesses land sufficient to plough with one or two yoke of oxen (dzo-ldor) as the case may be, or he may say that his land requires 2 'Kals' (80 lb.) of seed to sow it. It takes one yoke of oxen to plough a field requiring 1 kal of seed to sow it. Computed in terms of Indian survey measurement, this extent of land would be two 'bigars.' 423 241 804

The average amount of land possessed by a single farmer is that which can be ploughed by one yoke of oxen in four days, therefore requiring 4 kals (160 lb.) of seed. The average yield in a good year for each kal of seed sown is tenfold. 423 241

Lha-zhing (Field belonging to a God).

Dispersed throughout the country are fields which from ancient times belong to a local god (Lha-zhing). These are cultivated by the peasants who, at the Buddhist new year (February), and again in May when ploughing begins, have to regale the bearer of the wood image of that god with beer and one measure of barley. The cultivator of these fields may, however, reserve the harvest for his own use. [176]

Alternation of Crops.

Barley is sown two years successively, and the land is manured on the previous autumn or spring. On the third year a crop of wheat is grown, the land being similarly treated with manure. On the fourth year buckwheat is sown, but this does not require manure. Then on the fifth year barley is again sown, and so on. 241

Barley, wheat and buckwheat have been grown for an indefinitely long time, and are indigenous crops, but during the past fifty years rye has been cultivated with marked success. This was introduced by the Moravian mission operating in this country, as also were potatoes, vegetables and fruit trees. [177]

Sometimes an insect destroys the barley soon after it is sown, in which case the people water the unproductive field and then sow more seed by loosening the soil with a small implement like a hoe with a short handle (surmo).

19¦ Asboe M-3 (no date) 1937 AJ4 W. Tibetans AJ4
Lahul

A Second Crop.

241 In recent years the peasants have shown considerable enterprise by sowing two crops in a year, the first being that of barley, followed by a crop of buckwheat.

How Grass and Straw are sold.

435 When selling grass, the peasant disposes of it at the rate of one rupee per two 'martacks' (a martack being a load of grass which can be enclosed by a leather rope 24 cubits in length).

[482] Similarly, straw is sold by the martack, but in order to carry this load it is necessary to use two ropes of 24 cubits length, and adjust them so as to form a sort of net. Three of these loads of straw can be bought for a rupee.

241 *Method of Sowing.*

The seed is first scattered over the field and then ploughed in with a light plough which can

[231] easily be carried on one's shoulder. The plough is drawn by *dzos* (male hybrid of a yak and a cow), whereas in other parts of Tibet the seed is thrown into the furrows.

Occasionally a harrow made of thorns tied together is drawn across the ploughed field by *dzos*, though the usual practice is to beat the clods of earth with mattocks.

427 *Letting Land.*

It often happens that a farmer will let his land

241 to another, because he is too short-handed to cultivate it himself, or because he contemplates a trading expedition into the interior of Tibet. The arrangement that is made therefore is that the tenant receives half the crop in return for seeding, the seed being supplied by the tenant, ploughing, irrigating, weeding, threshing and winnowing the crop, whilst the landowner pays the revenue and the cost of repairing and watching the watercourse supplying the field with water.

249 *Rusta* (*Inula Helenium*).

Of late years the peasants have engaged energetically in the development of a spicy root called *Rusta* (Inula Helenium). This root was originally smuggled into the country from the Kashmir State which has the monopoly of *Rusta*. It is readily grown and, when matured, dried and sold, yields a handsome profit, its cost price being about Rs. 2 and 8 annas per lb.

Exchange of Labour.

476 As most transactions between the peasants are

[436] conducted by way of exchange in goods or labour, little money is passed from hand to hand.

For instance, if a farmer requires three or four

19; Asboe M-3 (no date) 1937 AJ4 W. Tibetans AJ4
Lahul

476 men or women to assist him in working his fields for a given number of days, he must on a subsequent occasion supply the equivalent in man power when called upon to do so.

The Farm Servant (*Len-mi*).

556 The more opulent farmers keep one or more
464 men or women as permanent servants. These
465 are employed from spring until autumn, their remuneration consisting of one piece of homespun cloth sufficient to make an outer garment, board and lodging, and a payment of 12 rupees at the expiration of their period of service. If the servant be a male, his allowance is the same as that given to a woman, with the exception that he receives double that amount of money (*i.e.*, 24 rupees). In some cases, however, the payment is entirely in kind.

233 *Village Shepherds* (*Lug-rdzi*).

[422] Each village employs three shepherds to
464 pasture the communal flocks. These shepherds
621 have, however, to perform subsidiary duties, such as assisting each householder in building or repairing walls round the fields, ploughing and threshing.

When the harvest is gathered in, the shepherds make a house to house collection of barley and buckwheat. In addition to this they receive one fifth of the produce of wool from the communal flocks, which is divided amongst them equally.

Loans in Grain.

426 Many of the monastic institutions in Western
792 Tibet are very wealthy and increase their income
241 by negotiating loans of grain to the poorer peasants, taking interest at the rate of five measures for each kal of grain lent (*i.e.*, 10 lb. of grain for every 40 lb. lent, *viz.*, 25 per cent.). The result of this extortionate rate of interest is to put the poor farmer entirely in the hands of the priesthood, and rob him of every chance of increasing his annual output of crops through acquiring new farm implements or improving his land in other ways.

Manufacture of Beer.

273 The consumption of locally brewed beer from barley is very considerable, for at least one third of the annual yield of barley is converted into this liquor. Whilst it is difficult to estimate the
273 exact quantity of barley used for the manufacture
439 of beer, the average would be roughly 20 *kals* of barley per household (800 lb.) This means that the Lahouli has to import large quantities of

19: Asboe M-3 (no date) 1937 AJ4 W. Tibetans AJ4
Lahul

439 grain from Kulu, a neighbouring state. Thus
273 the wholesale manufacture of beer from locally-grown produce has an economic significance as serious as it is unwise.

The Care of Livestock.

231 The people are on the whole kind to their animals and feed them as well as they are able with the limited yield of fodder at their disposal.

From December until April, the heavy snowfall in Lahoul precludes the possibility of grazing cattle. The animals have therefore to be housed on the ground floor of the houses. They are never bedded as in western countries.

When the supply of hay is exhausted the cattle are fed entirely on straw, this being again supplemented in the spring by the bark of willow branches cut and thrown into the pen to be peeled off by the sheep, goats and cows.

The willow tree is extensively cultivated owing to its use both for fodder and fuel.

It is customary for a peasant with more cattle than he can conveniently feed, to hand his surplus livestock to a neighbour to keep and feed from December to April, the price for the cattle thus treated being three rupees per head, and four or

19¼ Asboe M-3 (no date) 1937 AJ4 W. Tibetans AJ4
Lahul

five rupees per pony. Provided that the farmer has sufficient fodder to feed his own and his neighbour's cattle, he is glad to get the extra heads in order to increase his supply of manure. 231

Conclusion.

Though the total yield of crops is meagre, as is to be expected in high altitudes and in a practically rainless country, the farmer gets as much out of the land as can well be expected. 241 511

Generally speaking he is very poor, and the prospect of famine is never far removed from him. Were it not for the wool trade carried on between the highlands of Tibet and Lahoul, by way of supplementing the slender harvest he reaps, the Lahouli would be far worse off economically. [439]

He does not take kindly to improved methods of agriculture, owing to the conservative attitude of the community as a whole. 241 511 185

The slow penetration of western civilization is, however, leading to a slight increase in agricultural activity, in that Lahoulis are now beginning to open up virgin soil which has lain uncultivated for centuries. 177

At best the struggle for existence in so elevated a region as Lahoul is a real and stern one.

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